

As our nation celebrated Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, we remembered Dr. King as a beacon of change. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. helped change America by exposing the injustice of how blacks were treated. With his strong leadership and unprecedented power of speech, he gave people the faith and courage to work peacefully for change to stop racial discrimination and promote equality and opportunity across America.

Dr. King believed that the government had a fundamental responsibility to meet the needs of its people. He had the vision of an America with true equal economic opportunity. In his 'I Have a Dream' speech, Dr. King spoke of the 'fierce urgency of now.' He said, 'This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism.' Those words were true in 1963, and they are true today.

Following MLK's example

Democrats are following his glowing example, working to bring change and a new direction for all Americans. Democrats put forward a "Six for '06" agenda for change last year, and in the first 100 hours of the 110 th Congress, we are working to pass legislation to address critical economic, health care, educational, and security concerns of ordinary families.

In our first week, we put in place rules to restore honesty, ethics, and civility; reinstituted pay-as-you-go budgeting; and brought transparency to the earmarking process. During the second week, we:

- enacted legislation to implement the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission;
- increased the minimum wage;
- promoted stem cell research; and
- cut the cost of health care and improved access to medicines by requiring HHS to negotiate with drug companies for lower drug prices for Medicare beneficiaries.

Making college more affordable

This week, we will consider [H.R. 5](#) , legislation that will take the first step in making college more affordable and accessible by cutting the interest rates in half on certain subsidized student loans over the next five years. This proposal is targeted on assisting the low- and middle-income students and their families with the most financial need – those who receive subsidized student loans, and will help about 5.5 million students. It is needed now more than ever - the costs of attending college continue to skyrocket due to rising tuition, fees, and interest rates on student loans – putting college out of reach for more and more students.

Energy independence

We will also consider [H.R. 6](#) , which will take the first step toward achieving energy independence by repealing billions of dollars in subsidies given to Big Oil, and investing the savings in renewable energy and energy efficiency. Specifically, the measure will:

- ensure that oil companies pay their fair share in royalties for drilling on public lands;
- create a Strategic Renewable Energy Reserve to invest in clean, renewable energy resources;
- promote new emerging technologies;
- increase the development and deployment of renewable sources;
- develop greater energy efficiency; and
- improve energy conservation.

While this new direction is critical to all Americans, as we remember Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., it is important to note that this legislation will help African American families in this country in particular. The first 100 hours legislation will bring a pay raise to 2.1 million hard-working African Americans, reduce drug prices for the 3.9 million African American Medicare beneficiaries, and helping the 2.1 million African American students at degree-granting institutions and the many more seeking the opportunity to attend college.

So at this moment, and in Reverend Martin Luther King's name, our nation must renew our efforts to bring about opportunity for all Americans. To truly honor his memory, America must do everything in it's power to fulfill Dr. King's dream.